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ABSTRACT

Part 1 of this report deals with the legal framework of adult education in France, particularly educational provision for women. It discusses the 1971 Acts, the Organizational framework, and the "groupements d'etablissements" (GRETAs) or groups of institutions voluntarily banded together to coordinate their further training activities. Activities for women that provide pre-training or preparation for working life are also described. They include pre-training schemes, vocational courses, activation schemes, and socio-educational work. Part 2 deals with the "Action Femmes" Project to provide women with access to permanent education involving three dimensions--personal, social, and vocational. Information provided includes project structure, figures on 1979-80 courses, and outline of the 1980-81 program. The report concludes with comments from a visit to the project, one in a series of activities dealing with promotion of equal status for women and adult education's potential role in such promotion. Conclusions pinpoint project problems and successes. (YLB)

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European network of interaction projects
in adult education

"ACTION FEMMES" PROJECT

(Chambéry, France)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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Strasbourg
1981

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"ACTION FEMMES" PROJECT

(CHAMBERY)

In connection with the European network of interaction projects in adult education, the "Action Femmes" Project, Chambéry (France), was visited (29 September-3 October 1980) by Mrs Michèle Goffette (France), Mrs Liliane Rouday, Mrs Giorgia Marcellini and Mrs Silvia De Cesaris Epifani (Italy), Mrs Holl and Mr Donders (Netherlands), Mrs Elsa Coutinho and Mr Antonio Nogueira (Portugal) and Mrs Gunillo Sterner (Sweden).

The visit was one of a series of activities dealing with the promotion of equal status for women and adult education's potential role in such promotion.

Accounts of previous activities appeared in document CC-GP3 (80) 10

Part One of this report deals with the legal framework of adult education in France, particularly educational provision for women, Part Two with the "Action Femmes" Project itself.

The programme for the visit and an overview of the French educational system are appended.

I. ADULT EDUCATION IN FRANCE

The legal history of further training for adults in France really begins with the 1971 Act on further vocational training for adults as part of permanent education. Not that there had been a void until then. Far from it: a national inter-trade (employer-workers' trade union) agreement had been signed in 1970 and there were a great many legal provisions governing access to workers' training, but none of them comprehensive.

The 1971 Act was the first truly comprehensive legislation reflecting an overall strategy. It laid down several guiding principles:

- entitlement for all to educational leave on full pay (subject to certain stipulations);
- a financial contribution from firms based on a 1% payroll tax;
- a genuine educational market, with public and private sectors in competition.

The Act provides that "further vocational training shall form part of permanent education. Its purpose shall be to enable workers to adjust to changing technology and working conditions, to promote their social advancement by affording access to the various levels of culture and occupational qualification, and to foster their contribution to cultural, economic and social development". In

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addition, "the state, local authorities, state institutions, public and private educational institutions, associations, professional, trade union and family organisations and firms shall be jointly responsible for providing it".

A 1978 Act altered and clarified the 1971 legislation to the following effect:

Training leave may be granted in respect of:

- pre-training and preparation for working life;
- adjustment training (to assist entry to a first or new job);
- training for upgrading;
- prevention schemes (to counter possible failure to adapt by preparing workers whose jobs are threatened for a change of work);
- conversion training (to enable workers whose contracts are terminated to take up jobs requiring different qualifications);
- initial, refresher and further training courses.

Further, "the purpose of training leave shall be to enable every worker to attend training schemes during his working lifetime, on his own initiative and on his own behalf, with a view to improving his qualifications, changing jobs or occupations, or widening his cultural and social horizons".

Eligibility for educational leave is subject to two years' employment in the trade and six months with the firm. The employer may withhold leave only where more than 2% of the work force are simultaneously absent for training purposes. Lastly - and most importantly - the Act provides for training leave on full pay. For short courses (under 500 hours), payment is by the firm for the first 160 hours, and thereafter by the state. For longer courses, the firm pays for the first 500 hours, the state for the remainder up to a maximum of one year.

Since 1973, state schemes have operated through specially set up "groupements d'établissements" (training for adults is also provided by other state bodies: the universities, the Association pour la Formation Professionnelle des Adults, and the Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers and its offshoots).

1. State schemes: the organisational framework

a. National level

Further training is organised interministerially, under the direct oversight of the Prime Minister and centrally administered by the Secrétariat Général à la Formation Professionnelle. The Groupe National de Contrôle supervises application of the regulations governing employers' financial contributions.

b. Regional level

Responsibility for supervising regional vocational training policy rests with the Regional Prefect (the region being an administrative unit comprising several "départements"). At this level are located:

- the regional vocational training committee (CRFP);
- the financial control unit.

The regional vocational training committee:

- advises the Regional Prefect on vocational training matters;
- liaises with the various regional agencies involved;
- administers contracts: regional headquarters uses the funds available for contracts with the GRETAs (1) (and private bodies) for training schemes in line with the training priorities laid down by the Prime Minister (according to the circumstances of the moment). In this administrative capacity, the region enlists the help of several bodies, including the "Délégation Académique à la Formation Continue" (see below).

The control unit supervises the performance of employers' obligations as regards payment and use of the 1% payroll tax.

The proceeds can be used for:

- training within the firm;
- training contracts with state or (recognised) private bodies;
- payments to bodies recognised by the Prefect for special schemes (research, free training, information etc);
- helping to fund training schemes which comply with the priorities laid down by the Prime Minister.

The Délégation Académique à la Formation Continue (DAFCO) (2)

This service of the Ministry of Education comes under the "Recteur d'Académie". It has 3 functions:

- to develop regional adult education policy;
- to supervise the content of training courses;
- to assist and train tutors.

DAFCO supervises the management of training contracts entered into by public authorities with GRETAs and firms.

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(1) Groupements d'établissements.

(2) Education area ("académie") offshoot of the Ministry of Education's Further Training Department.

2. The "groupements d'établissements" (GRETAs)

a. Constitution

GRETAs are groups of establishments which voluntarily band together to co-ordinate their further training activities, while remaining primarily technical and secondary schools. The setting-up of a GRETA involves the signing of a memorandum of association.

b. Aims

- joint analysis of local training needs (both latent and expressed) and of specialisms catered for by the group;
- a thorough review of present and future training capability, account being taken of school and university, training provision and local vocational requirements;
- joint investigation of training methods and techniques best suited to the needs of the various categories of student concerned;
- joint action to provide information and channel applicants into the courses answering their particular needs;
- permanent liaison with partners, employers, wage-earners, self-employed (and even non-employed) workers requesting training, other training providers as appropriate (state or private sector), bodies able to provide services or technical help (OFRATEME, ADEP etc);
- a medium-term programme of training activities and the resources it requires.

c. Operation

There are two councils:

- the inter-establishment council in charge of GRETA administration, comprising:
  - . heads of member establishments,
  - . GRETA training counsellors,
  - . the administrative officer in charge of management;
- the further training council, on which all parties concerned with further training within the GRETA's area jointly frame group policy. It consists of:
  - . local authority representatives (mayors, councillors),
  - . members of the inter-establishment council,
  - . trade unionists,
  - . members of employers' organisations,
  - . staff and student representatives.

d. Mode of action

Staff:

- GRETAs can bring in a number of Ministry of Education-appointed further training counsellors with responsibility for organising operations;

- the tutors (secondary school teachers working in adult education on an overtime basis or non-teachers from various occupations, for whom the GRETA provides basic and refresher training);

- full-time teaching staff, whose salaries the GRETAs refund to the state ("postes gagés")

Schemes:

GRETAs can either:

- enter into training contracts with the firms, or

- enter into agreements with the authorities.

II. SCHEMES ON BEHALF OF WOMEN

The 1971 and 1978 Acts provide for the setting-up of schemes specifically catering for certain categories of women, viz: "mothers wishing to take up employment requiring a qualification and single women acting, or having acted, as quasi-domestic helps within their own families".

Once the experiment was under way, it became evident that the initial emphasis should be on pre-training. The 1978 Act confirmed this emphasis, adding to the types of scheme covered by the 1971 Act "... schemes providing pre-training or preparation for working life ..."

The Act also included workers' training schemes with a cultural bias.

Housewives therefore, do not normally benefit under the Act, though other measures do cater for them to some extent:

- certain pro-employment measures ("pacte pour l'emploi");

- state action as part of local or regional development schemes;

- action by the Interministerial Committee on behalf of Housewives;

- experimental Ministry of Education schemes.

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Types of activity (1)

1. Pre-training schemes

- Aim:

Preparation for entry or return to working life. Trainees enter employment direct or after vocational training.

- Content:

Skills: observation - clarity - powers of expression - literacy - numeracy-filing - locating information - job-hunting; developing powers of imagination, movement training.

- Specifications:

100 to 200 hour courses over several (on average 6) months to enable women to:

. initiate a change of pace and life-style, and organise their lives accordingly;

. take a definite decision about resuming work - or change their minds,

. finalise their vocational plans in relation to openings, personal aptitudes and personal tastes;

in other words, take as enlightened a career decision as possible (with regard to themselves and their surroundings).

2. Vocational courses

- Aim:

To teach occupational techniques, train for employment etc.

- Observations:

The courses seldom provide preparation for what are traditionally considered to be male occupations. The bias is more towards the service sector or, occasionally, new types of job (eg frozen food adviser/saleswoman, typist - telex/switchboard operator).

In the latter case, further education counsellors from GRETA schools approach firms for negotiation purposes. Together they

. examine current and prospective job skill requirements;

. discuss course content and instruction arrangements (mix of teachers and professionals).

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(1) According to particulars supplied by the Ministry of Education.

3. Activation schemes

Work here comes into two categories:

- Aim 1

Getting through to target groups - women cut off in urban housing estates, the rural community and the educationally "unreachable" generally. There is no set approach. The work forms the first stage of a larger educational operation mainly geared to ascertaining target group expectations. It prepares the ground for the socio-educational and activation schemes described below (or for vocational pre-training projects).

- Aim 2:

Activating the whole population (rather than a specific group) within a given geographical area. The aim is to involve the population concerned in regional planning and development.

4. Socio-educational work

- Aims:

. to allow or encourage groups within specific geographical areas (urban development zones, neighbourhoods etc) to air their everyday problems, whether relating to their environment (housing, surroundings, amenities) or to family and social life (loneliness, children, administrative and financial machinery, social security, bank);

. to equip them to change their outlook, organise, find personal and/or communal solutions, if only by winning recognition and a hearing from the powers that be.

- Features:

Promotion is usually done by the permanent education units (MEPs), associations and social workers. The education system contributes technical and/or pedagogical assistance.

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STRUCTURES GENERALES DE L'ACTION DE L'ETAT

	PREMIER MINISTRE	MINISTERE DE L'EDUCATION	MINISTERE DU TRAVAIL	SECRETARIAT A L'EMPLOI FEMININ	MINISTERE délégué à la condition FEMININE et à la FAMILLE
niveau national	Conseil National de la Formation Professionnelle FONDS de la FORMATION PROFESSIONNELLE	DIRECTION des LYCEES / Service Formation Continue	Association pour la formation professionnelle des Adultes (AFPA) Agence Nationale Pour L'Emploi (ANPE)		(rattaché au PREMIER MINISTRE)
niveau régional	PREFECTURES de REGION CRFP Comité Régional de la Formation Professionnelle	RECTORAT / Délégué Académique à la F.C.			déléguées régionales à la C.F.
niveau départemental	PREFECTURES DEPARTEMENTALES CDFP Comité Départemental de la Formation Professionnelle	INSPECTION ACADEMIQUE / Conseiller en Formation Continue	DDTE Délégation départementale au Travail et à l'Emploi		déléguées départementales à la C.F.
niveau	11	ETABLISSEMENTS SCOLAIRES / GRETA *	Agence locale pour l'emploi ALPE		12

* Groupements d'établissements scolaires

III. THE "ACTION FEMMES" PROJECT, CHAMBERY

1. Origins

The project, in operation since 1975, was intended as a concrete response to ideas put forward by various individuals and institutions concerning training for women, housewives particularly, in Chambéry.

The Centre Universitaire de Savoie (CUS), the Maison de la Promotion Sociale (MPS), and family and women's associations were the instigators.

2. Goals

To provide as many women as possible (wage-earning or otherwise) with access to permanent education, involving:

- a personal dimension:

  self-discovery; facing up to responsibilities; self-fulfilment and recovery of self-confidence; cultivating personal potential;

- a social dimension:

  assuming responsibility within the family; taking on voluntary responsibilities (municipal, neighbourhood, parent-teacher associations etc); taking one's place in society;

- a vocational dimension:

  having the confidence to look for a job or apply to retrain.

3. Problems

For women generally, and women with children in particular, access to permanent education is relatively awkward.

Firstly, they are up against all the preconceived ideas and social and cultural habits described in "Socio-cultural advancement of women and adult education" (CC-GP3 (80) 10).

Secondly, legislation often has little or nothing to say on the subject:

- non-wage-earning women are excluded from the 1971 Act;

- available vocational training is often unsuitable or unduly arduous for women with little or no work experience or who have interrupted a career.

4. Structure

The way the project is organised reflects both its origins and aims. It is managed by a team of twenty representing the three groups of individuals/institutions concerned:

- the educational agencies (the Centre Universitaire de Savoie, the GRETAs, the Mission Education Permanente, the Chamber of Commerce, the Youth and Sport Department, the Maison de la Promotion Sociale);

- the women's associations, with representatives of the Association Syndicale des Familles, the Union Féminine Civique et Sociale, the Fédération des Familles de France, the Union des Femmes Françaises, the Association des Veuves Civiles, Accueil des Villes de France, and the Soroptimists;

- individuals (participants and ex-participants).

Each group meets quarterly to discuss the project from its own standpoint, then reports to the management team. This meets every six weeks, but one afternoon a fortnight is set aside for meetings of the three committees (the information and publicity committee, the women's labour/employment committee and the course committee). Each committee's meetings are open to anyone who wants to attend; the person in charge is responsible for writing the minutes and representing the committee at Bureau meetings.

The committees carry out research (eg on a neighbourhood basis, in firms etc) towards schemes enabling - for instance - women at work to attend courses not specifically vocational in character. The course committee discusses the methodological and content problems posed by the various courses. The Bureau deals with committee recommendations, takes decisions and gets schemes off the ground. It is also responsible for the general co-ordination of "Action Femmes". It comprises two delegates from each group, though the participants'/ ex-participants' group at present has three, so that the Bureau totals seven members. The two full-time project officials also attend the Bureau's once-weekly meetings.

5. Some figures

1979-80 COURSES

Basic self-improvement courses	Numbers attending	Length of course (in hours	Total student hours
Activation and communication (level 2, November)	14	24	336
Writing and oracy (level 1)	15	35	525
Writing and oracy (level 2 -CUS)	16	42	672
Reading	12	20	240
Writing and oracy (level 1)	15	36	540
Activation and communication (level 1)	14	24	336
English (level 1)	15	40	600
English (level 1)	15	40	600
Literacy	16	70	1,120
Literacy	10	18	180
Technical courses			
Woodwork	10	48	480
Typing (group 1)	16	35	560
Typing (group 2)	13	35	455
Basic computing	10	30	300
Welding	10	40	400
Car maintenance (3 groups)	45	24	1,080
In collaboration with the GRETA			
Women's rights	10	34	340
Reading the newspapers	12	28	336
Writing and oracy	12	34	418
Know your region	12	34	418
Legal information	80	3	240
	372	694	10,175
In collaboration with the MEP			
Mother-and-child			

A 1981 budget of around 340,000 FF is anticipated. The main sources of finance are the Ministry of Education (experimental funds), the European Social Fund and the local authorities.

6. Programme

The 1980-81 programme is as follows:

Autumn term:

One-day courses:

. writing and oracy,

. activation - communication,

. self-defence,

. electrical repairs (domestic appliances).

Evening and Saturday morning courses (mainly intended for women with a job or a dependent family):

. basic car maintenance

. writing and oracy.

Volunteer training:

. mounting a training scheme, follow-up to and evaluation of courses,

. gauging the audience,

. dealing with enquiries.

Teach-ins:

. legal information:

marriage contracts,
gifts, bequests, wills;

. loneliness (films followed by discussion).

Second term:

One-day courses:

. spelling, grammar,

. car maintenance,

. reading the newspapers,

. basic economics,

. working with pewter,

. self-expression and communication through drama

. photography.

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Evening and Saturday morning courses:

. labour law, entitlement to training, the right to organise,

. administrative formalities,

. preparation for retirement (life after retirement),

. reading the newspapers,

. self-defence.

Volunteer training:

. running meetings, basic management,

. rapid writing.

Teach-ins:

. legal information:

women's employment and personal rights,

. diet, nutrition and health,

. co-operatives,

. insurance schemes (friendly societies, social security),

. film discussions.

7. Comments on reactions expressed

The following comments, intended to shed light on certain problems, make no value judgments about the experiment. The whole idea of behind the interaction network is, after all, for practitioners to exchange information and compare notes in a spirit of openness and fraternal candour, and the very notion of assessment by a group of outside "experts" is totally alien to it.

The comments follow the programme of the visit (Appendix 2).

a. Meeting with the management team

The management team, comprising representatives of the three groups (educational agencies, women's organisations, participants and ex-participants), clearly operates highly informally with a minimum of red tape. Participants' representatives are not elected, but simply interested volunteers. All the participants and ex-participants therefore have a say in decision-making. This approach would of course create problems were the participants' delegation to grow too large, but so far that does not seem to have happened.

The discussions clearly indicated a possible bone of contention between the formally-constituted educational agencies as a group, and the project. This problem is analysed in section (b).

The women's worganisations' approval of (or acquiescence in) the project was, however, clear to see - remarkably enough, since in a French context, the organisations concerned are far from seeing eye to eye.

b. Meeting with the educational agencies

Right from the start, the involvement of the educational agencies working in Chambéry was a remarkable circumstance. They regard the "Action Femmes" project not as a competitor, but as filling a gap, having seen for themselves how difficult it is to reach women in the community, and the need to pre-train women without basic qualifications before they begin courses of a higher standard.

The project therefore fulfilled two essential functions:

- to develop education-mindedness in a section of the community which had all but eluded the conventional organisations;

- to organise training as preparation for entry to standard courses.

Beyond a certain point in the growth of the project, conflicts of interest were to be expected.

Economic difficulties, particularly falling demand, creates friction between the educational agencies normally responsible for meeting customer needs. Some of them will actually be fighting for survival, instead of eager to expand. This makes competition fiercer.

Moreover, "Action Femmes", because of its above two functions, performs an ambivalent role. The second of its functions may look purely technical, while the first - to which we shall return - is much more ideological (women's emancipation, through access to permanent education) - and does in fact put the education bodies in an awkward position, depending on their own aims. Promoting equal status for women, whatever the views of individuals involved, is not one of the institutional aims of the Chamber of Commerce or the Centre Universitaire de Savoie, though some bodies may feel more at home with it (the Mission Education Permanente and the Maison de la Promotion Sociale, for instance).

But the "technical" function poses problems too. Firstly, it is obviously possible for areas of overlap between programmes to emerge, since the boundary between pre-training and training is not always clear, which may lead to competition between the participating bodies in a period of crisis.

Tension has also been caused by the "Action Femmes" project's use of volunteers, who are felt to be - as it were - poaching on the preserves of the professionals from the other bodies.

c. Meeting with the women's organisations

A priori, for women's organisations of very different persuasions to participate and work in harness seems not to pose any special problems. "Action Femmes" can be assumed to be moving in much the same direction as all of them (though allegations that its "ideological" message is occasionally woolly may perhaps result from this very inclusiveness). And abandoning this broad basis for a more forthright, more "radical" stance, potentially deeply divisive, might end up being counter-productive.

Here, too, the principle of non-competition tacitly applies, as it did vis-à-vis the educational agencies. "Action Femmes" has no desire to supplant existing bodies.

d. Meeting with a group of students, ex-students and tutors

The final afternoon was devoted to full, open-ended discussion with a gathering of some 50 or so students, ex-students and tutors, which left the visitors with the impression that each of the students present had acquired, or built on, the ability to be clear and analytical which is the first aim of "Action Femmes". Of course, not all the students or ex-students were present; perhaps those who came along represented the group with the fewest problems, but it was clear that, as individuals, they had grasped and embraced its main aims.

It was evident from several of the contributions that attendance by wives and mothers at training courses often posed tricky family problems. Either role conflict develops - and, if the worst comes to the worst, a potential crisis - or the mother's/wife's progress is wholeheartedly accepted as an opportunity for her to relate afresh to husband and children.

The presence of several male car maintenance and metalwork tutors led to an interesting discussion of the difficulties experienced by, respectively, tutors dealing with an unfamiliar audience, with which they have no day-to-day job contact, and students in typically masculine territory. (There were references to the fire myth, ironfounding, the alchemists etc.) The "Action Femmes" project's main difficulty here is finding suitably qualified tutors who are also prepared to change some of their preconceived ideas and attitudes, so as to meet their audience half-way and recognise them as being at least averagely competent.

e. Meeting with the "Action Femmes" Bureau

The final morning was given over to discussing the following few conclusions with the "Action Femmes" Bureau (volunteers and full-time officials).

8. Conclusions

As previously stated, the aim of this report and of the visit is not to pass judgment, but to pinpoint problems and successes for the benefit of the interaction network.

In the next stage of the work, these findings will provide a basis for joint evaluation of similar experiments, which may yield models capable of being tested in member countries.

a. The "Action Femmes" approach

The general "Action Femmes" approach is of particular interest as a model. Its main features are flexibility, required of any venture catering specifically for the disadvantaged, non-competitiveness with existing bodies and complementarity to available courses.

In addition, decision-making is open and informal, management non-bureaucratic and based essentially on voluntary participation.

The teaching approach, mainly aiming to develop powers of expression and self-confidence, is a departure from more traditional practice. It clearly meets a need of the specific target group; a key element is humane, individual reception arrangements, with minimum red tape (no forms, no queues).

Lastly, an extremely important factor: the scale of the project, which is located in a small provincial town, where isolation, though present, as in all urban communities, never reaches intolerable proportions. The problems of the various groups are known, those who run the various areas of public life, educational institutions, know each other and can talk to one another. We have here something akin to a "district", as defined by B Schwartz.

b. Problems

There is of course a reverse side to these supposed virtues, which can lead to double-edged situations and sometimes serious crises.

As has been said, relations with educational bodies may be difficult in the event of economic crisis and financial stringency.

Regular use of volunteers can create problems. On the one hand, they eventually claim - rightly, in our view - professional status (so much, however, for the disinterested volunteer). On the other, when professionals see their statutory duties being performed by others, they may regard it as a challenge to their position.

Informal decision-making and management, an essential feature, may get in the way of overall continuity and coherence. Similarly, the necessarily empirical approach, combined with the desire to avoid ideological conflict with participating organisations, may lead to a certain woolliness as regards long-term objectives.

This, in our view, is not a problem peculiar to Chambéry; any educational venture is fated to be ambivalent by definition.

Nor should this be taken as a facile criticism of the project. One can well imagine what sort of project would take a diametrically opposite approach!

Financial problems are best tackled separately, given the impossibility of unravelling the complexities of funding procedures in the various countries. The Chambéry experiment does, however, confirm the potential value of combining funds from the various services and authorities concerned - education, but also family welfare, health, employment, leisure and town and country planning, local authorities (who stand to gain), regional and international bodies (the EEC is particularly involved).

c. Project scope

There are two kinds of lesson to be learnt from the "Action Femmes" project.

The first concerns schemes specifically geared to women; a feature of the project is the endeavour to achieve maximum adjustment (not always possible) to the needs of this section of the community and to its social and cultural position. Mrs Goffette's observations on female culture and the special constraints affecting women in our societies were all borne in mind (see doc. CC-GP3 (80) 10, "Socio-cultural advancement of women and adult education"), but are not always acted on for lack of funds especially as regards nursery facilities. It is most important for the project to be involved in the follow-up to collaboration in this field, when the problems can be looked at in more detail.

The other lesson has wider implications, for schemes on behalf of disadvantaged groups generally. The "Action Femmes" approach lends itself, mutatis mutandis, to a great many schemes aimed at audiences which traditional formats have consistently failed to reach. (Cf the findings of C Moorhouse ("Adult education, employment and groups") and P Clyne ("Underprivileged groups: new aspects and trends" - CC-GP3 (80) 11)). The experience accumulated by "Action Femmes" is valuable in this wider context

d. General conclusions

Thanks are due to all those to whom the group of visitors spoke during the four days. Their hospitality, combined with their candour in talking about their successes and difficulties, certainly shed light on a great many problems and assisted progress in this priority (but difficult) area of adult education . Both sides (visitors and visited!) must now suit action to word. It is to be hoped that the next stage in the Council for Cultural Co-operation's work in this field will help them.